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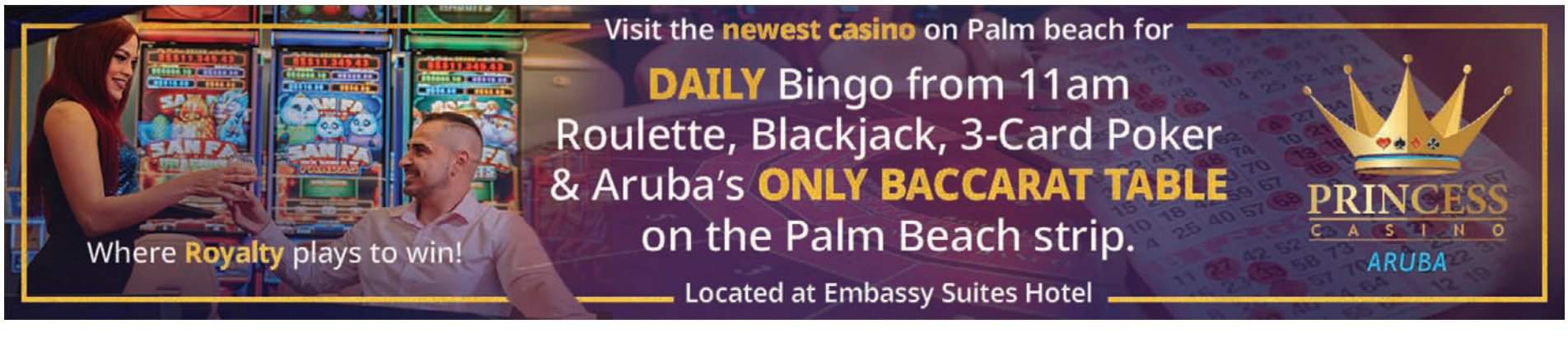
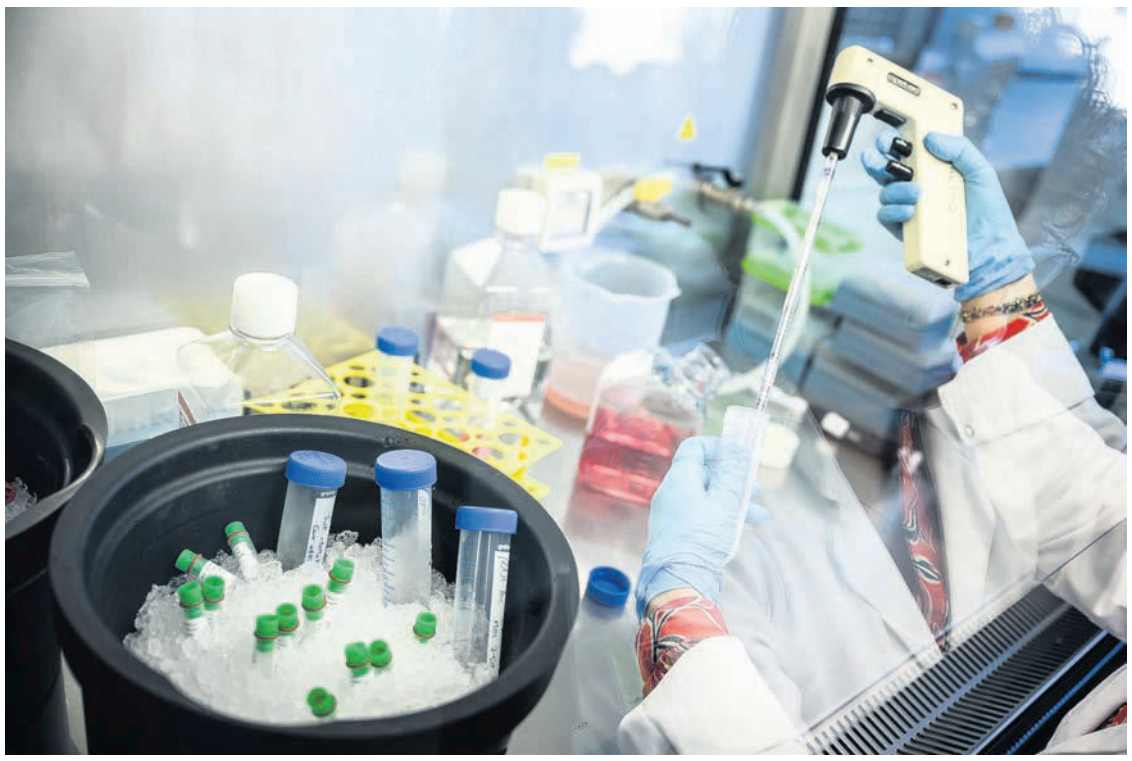


The Turning Tide: Why cancer survival rates are reaching historic highs

For decades, a cancer diagnosis was often viewed as a definitive period at the end of a sentence. However, recent data suggests that the medical community has reached a transformative milestone. According to the American Cancer Society (ACS) report, Cancer Statistics, 2026, the five-year relative survival rate for all cancers combined in the United States has officially reached 70% for patients diagnosed between 2015 and 2021. This is a staggering increase from the mid-1970s, when the survival rate hovered at just 49%.

This "stunning victory" is not the result of a single breakthrough but rather the convergence of three powerful forces: a dramatic decline in tobacco use, the precision of early detection, and a new generation of targeted and immunotherapies that have turned many once-fatal diseases into manageable chronic conditions.



A woman works on a lung cancer vaccine on October 1, 2023 at the Ose Immunotherapeutics laboratory in Nantes.

The Triple Engine of Progress

The decline in mortality and the rise in survival are driven by what experts call a "triple engine" of progress.

Reduced Tobacco Use: Since the 1960s, the proportion of active smokers in the U.S. has plummeted from 44% to roughly 11%. Because smoking is the leading cause of preventable cancer deaths, this shift has had the single largest impact on overall survival trends, particularly in lung cancer.

Early Detection and Screening: Finding cancer before symptoms appear is critical. Today, five-year survival for localized breast cancer is 99%, compared to only 28% if it has spread. Advancements in low-dose CT scans for lung cancer and regular colonoscopies have allowed clinicians to catch malignancies at Stage I or II, where cure rates are significantly higher.

Treatment Revolutions: For advanced-stage cancers that have already spread, new therapies are doubling and even tripling survival times. Innovative treatments like CAR T-cell therapy and immune checkpoint inhibitors (ICIs) are "taking the invisible cloak off" cancer cells, allowing the patient's own immune system to recognize and destroy them.

Breaking Records in Aggressive Cancers

The most encouraging news comes from cancers historically considered death sentences. Since the mid-1990s, the five-year survival rate for myeloma has doubled, jumping from 32% to 62%. Liver cancer survival has tripled from 7% to 22%, and melanoma has seen similar gains.

Perhaps most notably, lung cancer—the leading cause of cancer deaths—is seeing a rapid shift. For patients with regional-stage lung cancer, survival has increased from 20% to 37%. Even for metastatic (Stage IV) lung cancer, which had a 2% survival rate in the 1990s, the rate has increased fivefold to 10% thanks to personalized targeted therapies.

The Role of Technology and AI

The next frontier of survival gains is being paved by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Multicancer Early Detection (MCED) tests. AI is now used to assist radiologists in reading mammograms and tracking lung nodules, potentially reducing later-stage cancer diagnoses by 12%.

Meanwhile, MCED tests—often called "liquid biopsies"—aim to detect multiple types of cancer through a single blood draw. Simulations suggest that widespread use of these tests could lead to a 45% decrease in Stage IV diagnoses across 14 major cancer types, effectively "shifting" the diagnosis to an earlier, more treatable stage.

The Challenges of Success: The "Survivor Surge"

While the rise in survival is a triumph, it brings new challenges. By 2030, the U.S. is expected to have 25 million cancer survivors. This growing population requires a shift in healthcare focus toward "survivorship," which includes managing long-term side effects, mental health services, and the financial toxicity of prolonged treatment.

Furthermore, significant disparities persist. Despite overall progress, Native American and Black populations still experience higher mortality rates for several cancers due to socioeconomic barriers and unequal access to the latest breakthroughs.❑

The Golden Turnaround: California declared 100% drought-free

In an aerial view, water is released on the main spillway at Lake Oroville on January 12, 2026 in Oroville, California.

For the first time in a quarter-century, the entire state of California is officially free of drought and "abnormal dryness". According to the U.S. Drought Monitor data from early January 2026, the state reached a milestone not seen since December 2000: a map with zero square miles categorized as dry.

This remarkable recovery follows an exceptionally wet period spanning late 2025 and early 2026, which effectively erased lingering deficits and replenished the state's critical water infrastructure.

A Historic Milestone

The 25-year streak of at least partial dryness has finally broken. Just three months prior, nearly 70% of the state was experiencing some level of drought. However, a series of powerful atmospheric rivers and winter storms in December 2025 pushed the final holdouts—primarily in the far northern and southern regions—out of the drought categories.

By February 10, 2026, only roughly 1% of the state (about 1,105 square miles) was considered "abnormally dry," with 0% in any formal drought stage.

Reservoir and Snowpack Status

The surge in precipitation has translated into healthy levels for California's "savings accounts"—its major reservoirs. As of February 2026, the state's 17 major reservoirs were at 129% of their historical average.

Lake Oroville: The State Water Project's largest reservoir is at 134% of its average for this date.

San Luis Reservoir: Currently at 103% of its average.

Don Pedro & New Melones: Both holding steady above 125% of their historic averages.

While surface water is abundant, experts remain cautious about "snow drought" conditions. Although the rains filled lakes, warmer temperatures led to a thinner-than-ideal snowpack in some elevations, with snow-water equivalents recently measured at 71% of average for this time of year.

Looking Ahead: The "Hydroclimate Whiplash"

Governor Gavin Newsom and state water managers are framing this success as a testament to California's Water Resilience Strategy, which includes aggressive stormwater capture and storage investments. ❑

The Great Shift: Why e-bikes are outpacing traditional cycles

The bicycle industry is witnessing a "volt-induced" revolution. For the first time in history, annual sales of electric bicycles (e-bikes) have overtaken traditional non-electric cycles in several major markets across Europe and North America. This shift marks a fundamental change in how we perceive two-wheeled transport—moving it from a niche fitness hobby to a primary mode of urban mobility.

A Cowboy's employee, wearing a protective face mask, rides a Cowboy electric bike in the streets of Brussels, on July 28, 2020.

Crossing the Sales Threshold

In 2024 and 2025, data from industry groups like CONEBI (Confederation of the European Bicycle Industry) revealed that in countries like the Netherlands and Germany, e-bikes now account for over 50% of all bicycle sales. The U.S. market is following a similar trajectory; while total bike sales remained relatively flat post-pandemic, the e-bike segment grew by double digits.
According to a LeasePlan Mobility Report, the surge is driven by three key factors: the "sweat-free" commute, the aging "baby boomer" population reclaiming their mobility, and a massive drop in battery costs that has made mid-range e-bikes more affordable for the average household.

The Death of the "Cheating" Stigma

For years, purists dismissed e-bikes as "cheating." That narrative has effectively died. Today's consumers view the e-bike as a car replacement rather than a fitness tool. The Commuter Advantage: E-bikes allow workers to travel 10–15 miles to an office without needing a shower upon arrival.
Cargo Revolution: The rise of "longtail" cargo e-bikes has allowed families to ditch second cars, using the electric assist to carry groceries and two children up steep hills with ease.

Economic and Environmental Tailwinds

Government policy is the hidden motor behind these sales figures. In the U.S., various state-level e-bike rebate programs—such as those in Colorado and California—have provided residents with point-of-sale vouchers ranging from $300 to $1,500.
Environmental goals are also at play. As cities implement "low-emission zones," the e-bike has emerged as the most efficient way to navigate urban centers. A study by PeopleForBikes suggests that if e-bike adoption continues at its current rate, it could reduce urban CO2 emissions from passenger transport by up to 10% by 2030.

The Future: Smart Integration

As we move into 2026, the distinction between "e-bike" and "bike" is blurring further. New models are featuring integrated GPS, anti-theft "kill switches," and automatic shifting. With manufacturers like Specialized and Trek shifting their R&D budgets almost entirely toward electric platforms, the era of the traditional "analog" bike is becoming a specialized niche for sport and nostalgia.
The battery-powered pedal is no longer a trend; it is the new standard for the global cycling industry. ❑

For blight-ridden American chestnut tree, rebirth may be in offing

Meadowview, United States
The American chestnut tree, once a regal pillar of forests across the eastern United States, is on life support, struggling to survive.
"These look like death," said Vasiliy Lakoba, research director for the American Chestnut Foundation (ACF), which has been working since the 1980s to resurrect the species. He pointed to a patch of stunted shrubs, chestnut trees that were a far cry from the noble, erect chestnut trees of yesteryear.

Settlers along the U.S. eastern seaboard relied on abundant chestnut trees to feed their hogs, their children and themselves. Chestnuts made up about 50 percent of hardwood forests in much of the eastern seaboard, and the wood was ideal for building.
But then came a terrible fungus, identified in 1904 at the Bronx Zoo on a tree from Japan. In less than three decades, millions of American chestnut trees had perished. It has been considered the greatest tragedy in the history of American forestry.
"The devastation was so fast," said Lakoba, referring to "ghost forests."
Today, only a few rare specimens still survive to adulthood in the wild.

- 'Tall and straight' -

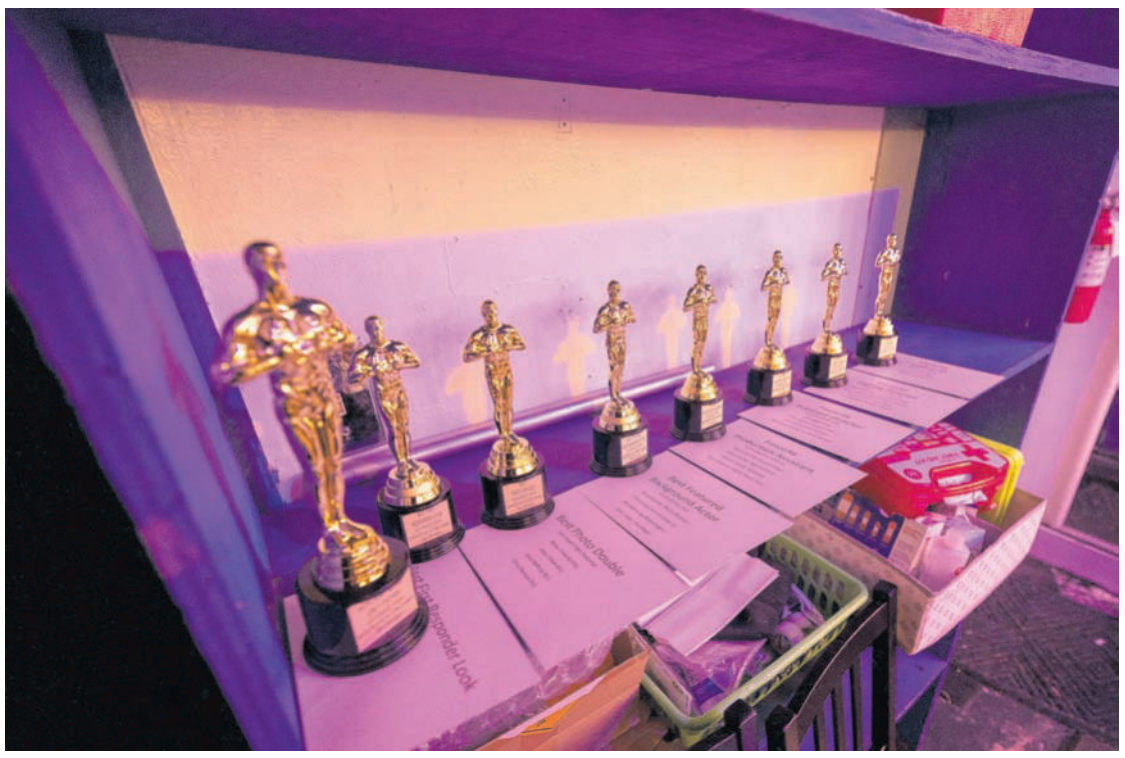
Nestled in the Appalachian Mountains, the foundation's main laboratory farm spans 36 hectares (almost 90 acres) in Virginia and includes tens of thousands of trees.
Workers use a crane to harvest the burrs, or spiny prickly shells that cover the nuts, then take them to a shed to be studied and used for future planting.
"It's like picking apples, but with pricks," laughed Jim Tolton, a technician on the farm, during a chestnut harvest day in early October.
Before the disease, the American chestnut tree "grew tall and straight through the forest, fighting for light," Lakoba said.
But the blight causes cankers to appear on the branches and stems of the American chestnut tree.
Blighted trees grow other branches here and there, giving them a bushy appearance, instead of maintaining a tall, straight shape.
No cure has yet been found to stop the spread.

- Hybrids and GMOs -

Finding a way to fight the blight is precisely the mission of ACF.
To do this, two main research avenues are under investigation: The first, which has been in place for years, consists of crossing an American chestnut tree with other species that already show some resistance to the fungus, such as the Chinese chestnut tree.
A first specimen is produced from this hybridization, before it is crossbred again with an American chestnut tree, then once again -- all in order to preserve as much of the original genetic characteristics as possible. The current hybrid has 15/16ths of the genetic makeup of an American chestnut tree -- while ideally acquiring the resistance of the Chinese chestnut tree.

A chestnut burr with nuts is seen on the ground at the American Chestnut Foundation's Meadowview Research Farm October 4, 2022, in Meadowview, Virginia.

One of the main drawbacks with these hybrids, explained Lakoba, "is that blight resistance and susceptibility have turned out to be a genetically much more complex phenomenon than previously thought."
ACF researchers have not abandoned their crossbreeding efforts. But a second avenue of research has opened up: genetic modification.❑



The winners' statuettes called "blurries" are displayed backstage during the 8th Annual Los Angeles Union Background Actors Awards ceremony at the Broadwater, in Los Angeles, California, on February 15, 2026.

'Not just props that eat': Extras seek recognition at their own 'Oscars'

Los Angeles, United States

Wearing an impeccable blue suit, Daniel Armella steps into the spotlight to receive an Oscar-shaped statuette.

Except that instead of being covered in gold, this trophy for Hollywood's best extras is made of plastic.

It is a minor detail for Armella, a background actor in the crime series "High Potential" who is as excited to get the nod as a movie star receiving an Academy Award.

"Wow! This is my third nomination, I was kind of feeling like a Leonardo DiCaprio stand-in," he said, referring to the Hollywood star's long wait for his Oscar.

Welcome to the 8th Annual Background Actors Awards, a ceremony held Sunday in parallel with Hollywood's glitzy award season but for those anonymous people who fill your screens every day.

Without uttering a word, they portray the nurses bustling behind doctors in the hit series "The Pitt," the agents guarding a crime scene in "NCIS" or, like Armella, work as "stand-ins" for stars.

"We're not just props that eat, we are people who are actually there and make the scene worthwhile," said the event's founder, Vincent Amaya.

"We are needed and without us, everything would look like crap."

Since 2018, he has been organizing this gala for these often overlooked entertainment industry workers in Los Angeles.

The winners are awarded a "Blurry" the informal nickname for the awards given to these performers, who often ply their craft in the background.

'Like ninjas'

The evening follows the format of Hollywood's higher-profile ceremonies, though with less glam.

Sequined dresses mix with simple jeans, and tuxedos are sometimes worn with work boots.

A dozen awards are presented, including "Best First Responder Look" and the top category, "Best Background Actor Ensemble."

This year, that award went to "High Potential," a show starring Kaitlin Olson as a high-IQ single mother who helps the Los Angeles Police Department solve crimes.

The jury is made up of about 40 members, each with an average of 20 years of experience, who are responsible for evaluating the nominees' appearances on screen.

"Background actors are like ninjas, and only ninjas can determine who else is a good ninja," Amaya told AFP.

Amaya, who is used to playing small roles, wants greater recognition for extras, to match the awards now given to others who were once in the background, like stunt performers and casting directors.❑

Taylor Swift bags best-selling artist of 2025 award: industry body

London, United Kingdom

U.S. pop star Taylor Swift was crowned the biggest-selling global artist of 2025, industry body IFPI announced Wednesday, the fourth consecutive year and sixth time she has claimed its annual prize.

The 36-year-old's success was turbo-charged by the October release of her latest album, "The Life of a Showgirl", which set several streaming records, as well as the release of a docuseries about her record-breaking The Eras tour.

"2025 was another landmark year (for Swift), driven by exceptional worldwide engagement across streaming, physical and digital formats with the release of her 12th album ... and the documentary of her tour," IFPI said.

The body, which represents the recorded music industry worldwide, noted Swift had now won its top annual artist prize as many times as all other artists combined over the past 10 years.

IFPI hands out the Global Artist of the Year Award after calculating an artist's or group's worldwide sales across streaming, downloads and physical music formats during the calendar year and covers their entire body of work.

Swift beat out Korean group Stray Kids, which came in second its highest-ever ranking and the third consecutive year in the global top five.

Fresh from his Super Bowl halftime show, Puerto Rican artist Bad Bunny placed fifth in the rankings, his sixth consecutive year in the chart.

American rapper Tyler, The Creator marked his first appearance on the chart, in 12th place, with IFPI noting he had "continued to generate strong vinyl sales across his catalogue". Meanwhile Japanese rock band Mrs. Green Apple entered the rankings for the first time one place below him, following what IFPI called "the success of their anniversary album '10'".❑

Fans take photos during Fans Celebrate The Theatrical Release Of "Taylor Swift: The Official Release Party Of A Showgirl" at Westfield Century City on October 03, 2025 in Los Angeles, California.

Russian era ends at abandoned launchpad in South American jungle

Kourou, France

"Stop. Danger of death. Work in progress."

This sign, written in Russian, is still hanging inside an office at the site where Russia once launched its Soyuz rockets from Europe's spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana.

However the jungle has been slowly reclaiming the launchpad on South America's northeastern coast ever since Russia hastily left in the aftermath of invading Ukraine in February 2022.

Under the tropical sun, vegetation has been encroaching on the vast concrete and metal structures that once vented flames created by giant rockets blasting off into space.

Vegetation grows on a former rocket launch complex site at Kourou in French Guiana on February 13, 2026.

Russia launched its Soyuz rockets from Kourou between 2011 and 2022. The site's position close to the equator was more suitable for some missions than the Russian-operated spaceport in Baikonur, Kazakhstan.

But the launchpad was abandoned overnight in response to European sanctions against Moscow over its war in Ukraine.

The Russian teams departed immediately, leaving scenes that appear frozen in time. AFP is the first media outlet to visit the site since.

There are now plans to redevelop the facility after the launchpad was awarded to the French start-up MaiaSpace, a subsidiary of aerospace company ArianeGroup.

MaiaSpace is developing Europe's first reusable light rocket launcher. After a delay, the rocket's first flight is scheduled for the end of this year.

'No point keeping it'

In one administrative building, old Russian logos are being replaced however some posters and instructions in Cyrillic script remain.

MaiaSpace also still prints on Russian paper called Snegurochka. Its pale blue packaging features snowy landscapes, which appear incongruous compared to the jungle surrounding the building.

Outside, the hulking infrastructure is now a testament to a long-gone era of space cooperation.

The metal arms that once held rockets on the launchpad are still standing. Ironically, they are painted in blue and yellow -- the colours of Ukraine. But they will be discarded during the redevelopment of the site.

There is also a life-sized Soyuz model that is being used to test the rails that will carry MaiaSpace's rocket to its future launchpad.

But once these tests are complete, it too will be scrapped.

"It's going to be dismantled there is no point in keeping it," Denis Grauby, MaiaSpace's representative in Kourou, told AFP.

Guiana Space Centre director Philippe Lier admitted it all felt "a bit strange".

"There are lots of nostalgic people here who wanted to keep everything that we dismantle, store it somewhere, turn it into a museum... I'm not of that mindset," he told AFP.

'New chapter'

But Lier acknowledged there were "vintage" and "moving" aspects of the launchpad because it is so similar to the Baikonur Cosmodrome, where the first human in space, Yuri Gagarin, launched from in 1961.

"The fact that we are reconfiguring it, not letting it fall into disrepair, is a great story," Lier said.

"It will be a new chapter in space exploration."

Given the sheer tonnage of Russian machinery still at the launchpad, it appears there is an enormous job ahead.

Among the items destined for the scrap heap is the gantry, which once sheltered Soyuz rockets from the tropical weather.

The Maia rocket launching system will have no use for it. The reusable rocket is assembled horizontally and put on the launchpad at the last minute with no supporting infrastructure.

So will it be possible to transform the site in time for a maiden rocket flight this year?

MaiaSpace said it has been working hard to hit this target and that getting the new equipment in place will take less time than clearing out the old machinery.❑

India celebrates cheetah births to boost reintroduction bid

New Delhi, India

India's ambitious bid to reintroduce cheetahs received a major boost Wednesday when the environment minister announced the birth of three cubs.

Bhupender Yadav hailed "a roaring new chapter", saying in a statement that India's cheetah population now stands at 38.

Despite high mortality, it marks an overall rise of 35 percent from the 28 introduced in batches since 2022.

Yadav shared a photograph of the spotted big cat with the trio of tiny cubs, born to a South African cheetah giving birth in India for the second time.

Asiatic cheetahs were declared extinct in India in 1952. The critically endangered subspecies, once found across the Middle East, Central Asia and India, now survives in very small numbers in Iran.

Their African cousins were first reintroduced in September 2022 to India, to the Kuno National Park, 300 kilometres (190 miles) south of New Delhi.

The high-profile project, championed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has been dogged by criticism over the deaths of several of the superfast cats after their release.

Critics have warned the creatures may struggle to adapt to the Indian habitat due to competition for prey from a significant number of leopards in the national park.

Celebrating the "joyful arrival" of the latest trio, Yadav said it "marks the ninth successful cheetah litter on Indian soil and takes the number of surviving Indian-born cubs to 27".❑

Three cheetah cubs stand at the Lunaret Zoo in Montpellier, southern France, on February 11, 2025.

Junk to high-tech: India bets on e-waste for critical minerals

Hundreds of discarded batteries rattle along a conveyor belt into a crusher in a remote plant in northern India, fuelling a multi-billion-dollar industry that is bolstering the country's geopolitical ambitions.

India is cashing in on the growing "e-waste" sector -- pulling critical minerals like lithium and cobalt, which are needed to make everything from smartphones to fighter jets and electric cars, from everyday electronics.

Global jitters about China's dominance as a critical minerals producer has kicked New Delhi into action, ramping up extraction of the materials that are essential for its drive to become an artificial intelligence hub.

With demand expected to soar and domestic mining unlikely to deliver meaningful output for at least a decade, the country is turning to an often overlooked source the swelling mountains of electronic waste.

This photograph taken on February 12, 2026 shows a worker sorting dismantled electronic parts at 'Ecowork', an e-waste recycling facility in Ghaziabad.

Dead batteries yield lithium, cobalt and nickel; LED screens contain germanium; circuit boards hold platinum and palladium; hard disks store rare earths e waste has long been described as a "gold mine" for critical minerals.

India generated nearly 1.5 million tonnes of e waste last year, according to official data enough to fill 200,000 garbage trucks though experts believe the real figure is likely to be twice as much.

At Exigo Recycling's sprawling plant in Haryana state, a machine churns the batteries from e-scooters into a jet-black powder.

The material is then leached into a wine red liquid, filtered, evaporated and finally transformed into a fine white powder lithium. "White gold," said the facility's lead scientist, watching the final product collect in trays.

Backyard workshops

Industry estimates suggest "urban mining" the recovery of minerals from e waste could be worth up to $6 billion annually.

While insufficient to meet India's projected demand, analysts say it could help absorb import shocks and strengthen supply chains.

Most e waste, however, is still dismantled in informal backyard workshops that extract easily saleable metals such as copper and aluminium, leaving critical minerals untapped.

India's formal recycling capacity remains limited compared to China and the European Union, both of which have invested heavily in advanced recovery technologies and traceability systems.

India has a "100 percent import dependency" for key critical minerals including lithium, cobalt and nickel, according to the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

Seeking to close the gap, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government approved a $170 million programme last year to boost formal recycling of critical minerals.

The programme builds on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) rules, which require manufacturers to collect and channel e waste to government-registered recyclers.

"EPR has acted as a primary catalyst in terms of bringing scale to the recycling industry," said Raman Singh, managing director at Exigo Recycling, one of the few Indian facilities able to extract lithium.

Other analysts agree the rules have redirected more waste into the formal sector.

"Before EPR was fully implemented, 99 percent of e-waste was being recycled in the informal sector," said Nitin Gupta of Attero Recycling, which says it can recover at least 22 critical minerals.

"About 60 percent has now moved to formal."

Government data suggests an even higher shift, though critics say the figures are inflated due to poor tracking of total e waste generation.

More than 80 percent of India's e-waste is still processed informally, according to a United Nations Development Programme note in October.

Rife with hazards

Indian government-backed think tank NITI Aayog warned that organised recycling lagged behind both policy targets and the rapid growth in waste volumes. Informal recycling is rife with hazards -- open burning, acid baths and unprotected dismantling expose workers to toxic fumes and contaminate soil and water. A bulk of India's e waste still flowed through informal channels, leading to "loss of critical minerals", said Sandip Chatterjee, senior adviser at Sustainable Electronics Recycling International.❑

Coffee regions hit by extra days of extreme heat: scientists

Paris, France

The world's main coffee-growing regions are roasting under additional days of climate change-driven heat every year, threatening harvests and contributing to higher prices, researchers said Wednesday. An analysis found that there were 47 extra days of harmful heat per year on average in 25 countries representing nearly all global coffee production between 2021 and 2025, according to independent research group Climate Central. Brazil, Vietnam, Colombia, Ethiopia and Indonesia -- which supply 75 percent of the world's coffee -- experienced on average 57 additional days of temperatures exceeding the threshold of 30C.

Brazilian coffee producer Moacir Donizetti Rossetto shows a burned coffee plant, in Caconde, some 300 km northeast of Sao Paulo, Brazil, on January 10, 2025.

"Climate change is coming for our coffee. Nearly every major coffee-producing country is now experiencing more days of extreme heat that can harm coffee plants, reduce yields, and affect quality," said Kristina Dahl, Climate Central's vice president for science.

"In time, these impacts may ripple outward from farms to consumers, right into the quality and cost of your daily brew," Dahl said in a statement.

U.S. tariffs on imports from Brazil, which supplies a third of coffee consumed in the United States, contributed to higher prices this past year, Climate Central said.

But extreme weather in the world's coffee-growing regions is "at least partly to blame" for the recent surge in prices, it added.

Coffee cultivation needs optimal temperatures and rainfall to thrive.

Temperatures above 30C are "extremely harmful" to arabica coffee plants and "suboptimal" for the robusta variety, Climate Central said. ❑

Amsterdam Manor Beach Resort Celebrates Aruba's Carnival with Dedicated Guest Experience for the Second Year

Eagle Beach, Aruba – For the second consecutive year, Amsterdam Manor Beach Resort proudly offered guests an exclusive and immersive way to experience Aruba's vibrant Carnival celebrations, reinforcing the resort's commitment to celebrating the island's rich culture and heritage.

During this year's festivities, guests were invited to enjoy a dedicated Carnival viewing space designed to provide comfort, convenience, and an authentic connection to the island's most colorful tradition. The experience included attentive on-site staff, refreshing snacks and beverages, organized transportation to and from the parade route, and commemorative Carnival T-shirts to mark the occasion.

Aruba's Carnival is one of the island's most cherished cultural events, showcasing dazzling costumes, live music, energetic dance performances, and deep-rooted traditions that reflect the spirit and diversity of the Aruban community. By creating a curated Carnival experience, Amsterdam Manor aims to give visitors not just a front-row seat, but a meaningful cultural encounter.

"Our goal is to go beyond offering accommodations," said Jurgen van Schaijk, Managing Director of Amsterdam Manor Beach Resort. "We want our guests to truly experience Aruba —its heritage, its people, and its traditions. Carnival is one of the most powerful expressions of our island's identity, and we are proud to facilitate that connection for the second year in a row."

This initiative is part of the resort's broader commitment to responsible tourism and cultural appreciation, ensuring that visitors engage with Aruba in an authentic and respectful way.

By combining comfort, hospitality, and cultural immersion, Amsterdam Manor continues to strengthen its role as a boutique resort that celebrates the heart and soul of Aruba.❑

The Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins and its history

(Oranjestad)—The Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins is one of the most visited places by tourists on the island, as it lies along the northern coast line near the mini pool and on the way to the Natural Bridge. Despite its seemingly plain appearance, this ruin represents one of the most important histories of the island: The Aruban Gold Rush.

Built in 1872 by English company Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd, the gold mill at Bushiribana was constructed in the area where most gold was found by locals. The story of gold on Aruba actually dates back to 1725, when a first exploration for gold on the island was commissioned by the Dutch West India Company. Under the leadership of Mr. Paulus Printz, a three-year search was conducted on Aruba, to no avail. Though they found some gold, it was enough to motivate a further search, and the assignment was discontinued by Printz himself.

It wasn't until 100 years later, in 1824, when a young boy found a lump of gold while out herding his father's sheep. His father took it to a local merchant who then sold the lump for $70. Unbeknownst to the boy and his father, they quite literally struck gold, and as word got out, a gold fever spread among the locals who started searching for more gold. About 25 pounds worth was found.

At the same time, the Aruban government took immediate actions, and informed Curacao that gold was found. At first, everyone could look for gold, as long as they sold it to the government. However, after some time, the government decided to implement stricter rules and banned local search parties.

Over the years, concession-holding had seen different companies from around the world, all of which used primitive methods to dig and carve out gold from the rocks. Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd. was no different, but used a unique method that involved grinding the rocks and letting the dust be blown

away by the strong northeast wind, leaving clumps of gold behind. The next step was melting the gold and letting it attach to quicksilver in order to obtain pure gold. All these processes were done at the Bushiribana Gold Mill.

The gold mill itself had a short lifespan: only 10 years in service, but its structure remained relatively solid till this day, and is now a historical remnant.❑

Sources: Etnia Nativa

Visit the natural bridges of Aruba!

(Oranjestad)—After you've visited the Alto Vista Church, the Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins and the mini natural pool that is located right next to it, you're next up around the northern coast line must be the Natural Bridge. Once the largest natural bridge in the Caribbean, this bridge has been a tourist attraction for many years.

The bridge was formed during thousands of years, cut and crafted by the wild waves that crash into the coral stone walls of the coast. Before its collapse, this bridge measured 30 meters in length and 7 meters in height, making it the biggest natural bridge in the Caribbean at the time. For many years, this site was also a frequently visited beach, as the bridge had a small opening through which the water would flow into the tiny beach.

Unfortunately in 2005, the bridge collapsed, and the little beach dried up. Despite this, this site remained a tourist attraction, with many visitors walking along the coral cliffs of the bridge to see the spectacular view of the northern coastline and the Caribbean Sea. Visitors can also still visit the souvenir shop on the left of the bridge entrance.

While the natural bridge no longer is functional, there is now a smaller natural bridge very close. This bridge is often called the "Baby Bridge" or "Daughter Bridge".❑

A quick snack for the road

Learn how to make the Aruban Pastechi!

(Oranjestad)—If you ever been to Aruba before, you probably heard of (and even tried) the Aruban Pastechi. Beloved by young and old, this tasty treat is a staple for party snacks, a quick lunch or even breakfast!

Here's how to make the Pastechi dough.

Ingredients:
- 4 cups of wheat flour
- 1 tbsp baking powder (if using self-rising flour, omit baking powder)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 0.5 cup of melted butter
- 1 cup water
- 1 egg

Directions:
Sift your flour into a bowl and add all the dry ingredients before giving it a quick mix. Next add the butter, water and egg and mix until thoroughly combined. At this point, your dough will start to get sticky; time for an arm workout. Knead your dough into the bowl you are using or on a clean surface with some flour lightly dusted until its surface is smooth. You'll know your dough is ready when it doesn't stick to your hands or the surface on which you're kneading it. Let your dough rest covered for 15-20 minutes.

After resting, divide your dough into approximately 100 gram balls and roll it flat with a rolling pin. The thickness of the pastechi depends on your taste, but the average thinness would be around ¼ inch or so.

Filling for the pastechis varies according to your taste. The easiest and most common filling you'll find in Aruba is a simple cheese filling. For this, we usually use shredded Gouda, but feel free to use any cheese that melts well when frying the pastry.

Place the filling on your rolled out piece of dough, fold it in half and

pinch the sides shut with a fork. If you have a folding tool, feel free to use it for this process. Your pastechi is ready for the fryer!

If you want to store some pastechis for later use, you can freeze them. A good tip is to place a piece of wax paper in between each pastechi if you are to store them on top of one another. This way the pastechis don't stick to each other when defrosting.

Here in Aruba we enjoy pastechi at any time of the day, but it has become almost tradition to eat pastechis for breakfast on the way to work. Many roadside snack trucks sell pastechi from early morning to noon, and offer a variety of fillings like cheese; ham and cheese; ground beef and pulled chicken to name a few.❑

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Aruba: The island of Aloes

ORANJESTAD – Aloe Vera, a succulent plant species, is renowned for its incredible properties for the skin. It is widely distributed and usually grows in tropical, semi-tropical and arid climates on the planet. But this plant also had a very prominent role in the history of Aruba, and its significance to the island's economy endures to this day.

The leaves of Aloe Vera contain a good amount of gel which when used topically, is great for the skin. Traditionally, Arubans use this gel to treat minor burns and other skin ailments, or just to keep skin supple and looking bright and nourished. Aside from the gel, aloe contains a bitter, yellow substance (called aloin) which is a gentle but powerful laxative, and it is also the origin of the industry of aloe in Aruba.

Aloe vera was introduced in Aruba around 1840, when most of the island's inhabitants were farmers of little means. Dutch Governor Van Raders introduced the plant after it had been introduced in other islands of the Caribbean to cultivate and harvest the aloe to produce the laxative.

Around 1920, about two-thirds of Aruba was aloe fields, earning our island the nickname "The Island of Aloes."

Under Commander Jan Helenus Ferguson (1866-1871), aloe experienced a boom, which is why there is a road named after him, which goes through the aloe fields. In the 19th century, Aruba was the main supplier of aloin for laxative, which was imported abroad to the United States and Europe.

The aloin from Aruba and Curaçao was known to be one of the best in the world and was more expensive, which meant that at the time, it had significant economic impact, particularly for the local farmers.

However, by the time the oil industry arrived on Aruba, it changed the labor market on Aruba, shifting away from agriculture. It would be after World War II that aloe would make a comeback. And eventually, as science learned about the amazing properties of aloe gel, the industry shifted from producing laxative to producing skin care. An interesting fact is that in 1951, the production of Aruban aloe amounted to around 30 percent of the total global production!

The impact and relevance of aloe is visible all around

Aruba. While most homes will have a few plants for personal use and decoration, houses are also decorated with aloe motifs, and at some point, aloe even featured on post stamps. Around 1920, about two-thirds of Aruba was aloe fields, earning our island the nickname "The Island of Aloes." And in 1955, the aloe became a part of Aruba's coat of arms, symbolizing prosperity for the island.❑

Images from the archive of the National Library of Aruba.

Fun facts about cacti hedges "Trankera"

(Oranjestad) – When off-roading in inland Aruba, you may notice some cacti hedges around various properties or lined up by certain pathways. These man-made hedges are called "trankera" and play an important role in maintaining our flora and fauna.

The trankera dates to colonialism, where settlers established several 'cunucu' (farm) on the island. People either used stone walls or trankera as a fence to ward off strangers and wild animals that can feed on the cunucu vegetation or cattle.

Nowadays, trankeras are less common, and those that still stand are often not maintained. On the surface this seems like a bad development, however this proved to be beneficial for our flora and fauna. Naturally developed flora around the hedges offers more shelter for fauna. Another aspect is the propagation process. When pruning hedges, flowers and seeds were removed, which limits propagation to a minimum.

So, though trankeras don't play that big of a role in Aruba's agriculture anymore, our environment still reaps the benefits of these long-standing natural structures.❑

Fun facts about the 'Lisinbein'

The 'Lisinbein' (Scolopendra gigantea), also known as the Giant Centipede, is one of the largest centipedes in the world and is found in Aruba. Its size and hunting prowess make it a fascinating, if often misunderstood, creature.

Despite its fearsome reputation, it plays a crucial ecological role that often goes unnoticed.

As an apex invertebrate predator, Scolopendra gigantea helps maintain balance in the ecosystem. Moreover, they themselves are a food source for birds such as the Crested Caracara (Warawara) and the Aruba burrowing owl (Shoco).

It controls populations of smaller invertebrates and even small vertebrates, ensuring that no species overpopulates, which could disrupt local biodiversity.

Its presence can indicate a healthy, functioning ecosystem. Its sensitivity to environmental changes makes it a bioindicator of ecological balance.

It can reach an impressive length of up to 30 centimeters (approx. 12 inches) and live for around 5 to 10 years in the wild. Its size and longevity makes it a significant and long-term part of the ecosystem.

A mother's love

In Scolopendra species, the 'mother' typically exhibits maternal care by curling around her eggs and newly hatched young. She stays coiled around the clutch, protecting it from predators and fungi, which are serious risks in the moist environments these centipedes often inhabit. The mother maintains a clean environment for the eggs by carefully grooming them, which helps prevent fungal growth that could endanger the brood. This behavior may continue until the young centipedes have undergone their first molt, making them more capable of independent survival.

This form of parental care is beneficial in increasing the survival rates of offspring, as the mother's protection provides a safe 'environment' during their vulnerable developmental stages. It's a fascinating adaptation because it shows a form of care that resembles more complex behaviors observed in vertebrates.

No bark, but all bite!

The lisinbein is known locally for having a really painful sting. While venomous, the Lisinbein is generally not aggressive toward humans unless provoked. Its role as a guardian of balance in the ecosystem helps protect the natural beauty of Aruba by keeping the ecosystem in harmony.

Editor's note: Information and pictures provided by Ms. Natasha Silva from the Aruba Conservation Foundation.❑

Lessons from our elders: Plants and fruits for medicinal use

ORANJESTAD—Though western medicine is now widely used for common illnesses and to keep our bodies healthy and happy, it is still very common in every household in Aruba (and around the world) to have staple home remedies that is passed on through generations. Here are some tips that our elders have passed on to us over the years.

Pineapple

Pineapple has more uses than topping it on your Christmas ham. According to elders, the skin of a pineapple is great to use to refresh your body. Clean the skin thoroughly and make tea or warapa* with it. It is said that this tea can also be drank after an operation on the ovaries or uterus. This gets rid of irritation and inflammation.

Arrowroot

Arrowroot is native to tropical America and can be sold as a powder or whole. It is said that you can take arrowroot powder and make a "shalup" (porridge) for stomach pain or when you're feeling weak. You can make it with milk too, but it is advised to best use just water. You can also add prunes for a bit of sweetness. Arrowroot shalup is also good to treat an unhealthy gut or for diarrhea.

To make arrowroot shalup, boil a bit of water and add one tablespoon of arrowroot powder and stir continuously until you reach porridge consistency. If you make a shalup with milk, add a pinch of salt. Raw arrowroot powder can be used to powder babies.

Eggplant/Aubergine

Eggplants, or aubergines, are easy to find in supermarkets around the world and can be grown all year round on the island. Related to potato and tomato, eggplants are good to calm nerves. It can also be used to lower blood pressure, by steeping its leaves in boiled water and drinking it. You can also make eggplant juice to help purify your blood. However, do make sure to drink slowly; let it mix with your spit and then swallow.

Eggplant kataplan* can also be used to treat skin tumors, abscesses and hemorrhoids. Eggplant kataplan can also be used externally to

treat arthritis. ❑

*warapa: term referring to a water and sugar solution, a.k.a simple syrup.
*kataplan: porridge-like mixture used externally for wounds or parts of the body that are painful or swollen.

Don't forget to visit Aruba's famous Red Anchor

At the south east coast of the island, standing alone on a windswept and barren land stands a popular Aruba landmark – a large anchor. It overlooks the sea just beyond, watching over the shipping lanes. It stands there in memory and in honor of all seamen who have lost their life at sea.

Where to find the anchor?
The anchor is a "must see" landmark when you visit Aruba. It is among the most photographed historical landmarks for the island. You want to make sure you add this stop on your itinerary when you're visiting the south coast of Aruba. The bright red anchor against the backdrop of the deep blue Caribbean Sea and the azure blue skies, make a great backdrop for your vacation pictures.

The anchor is located at the entrance to Gate 6 to the former Lago Colony. It is on the outskirts of Seroe Colorado, on the south east point of the island at the "T" junction to Baby Beach.

Depending on where you are staying on the island, follow the signs that indicate the way to Baby Beach. Once you reach the T-junction, it will be right in front of you.

About the anchor
Size
It will be hard to miss the anchor, it's huge! The anchor that weighs 21,772 kilos is approximately 10 feet 6 inches wide and 15 feet, 6 inches tall.

On the anchor there are some numbers. The 4112 and 4115, which are believed to be the serial numbers that refer to the "fluke" or horizontal and vertical parts of the anchor, respectively. The number 21772K refers to the weight of the anchor in kilos.

This type of anchor was manufactured by Hoesch Dortmund Horde, at a foundry located in Germany.

Where did the anchor come from?
There are a number of stories as to the origins of the anchor, which one do you think it was? (Unfortunately the mystery has never been solved, so your imagination can pick which one you think it might be!)

Story 1:
"According to Mr. Manuel M. Curiel, an ex-Lago Tug Captain, a fully laden VLCC (Very Large Crude Carrier) was seeking a mooring at the 15-mile anchorage, known as Bara, on the southern part of the island. This is the usual shallow mooring location for ships awaiting orders, etc. The weather was rough with strong current. The normal procedure is that they would walk out three shackles (about 90 feet) until the anchor touches the bottom while the chain must rest on the bottom. Subsequently, they will walk out some extra shackles and when the ship starts to swing or lean on one side, the anchor is properly set. Because of the rough weather, unfortunately they did not get the time to walk out the extra tackles and because of the tension exerted on the winch, it broke, and they lost the anchor and its chain."

Story 2:
"Mr. Curiel also said that at one time a small tanker with a Korean crew, while lifting their anchor also lifted another anchor near the inner harbor. When the ship asked for assistance, he went with his tugboat along with a barge, to help. But eventually they had to cut the chain and let the anchor go to the bottom because they could not untangle them. "

How did the anchor become a landmark?
Sometime between 1980 and 1985, three gentlemen (Mr. Wim Martinus – the Harbormaster of Aruba; Mr. August Genser – the ex-Division Superintendent of Lago's Laboratory; and Mr. Willie Davis), were having a conversation with Mr. Charlie Brouns Jr., local businessman. Charlie, who was a visionary and had dreams for developing the San Nicolas area, told these gentlemen that he would like to come up with something innovative for the San Nicolas area to draw tourism to the area.

The "anchor", which at that time was being stored at the Oranjestad harbor, was suggested as an option. Charlie liked the idea! He then contacted the President of Lago for permission to acquire the anchor. He was granted permission and the anchor was then relocated to its present location and dedicated "To All Seamen" on the occasion of the closing of the Lago Oil Refinery on March 31, 1985.

Through the years
Through the years the Anchor was slowly weathering from the wind and salt. As time passed, sadly the origin and purpose of the anchor slowly faded away from people's memories.

After Charles Brouns Jr. died on September 15, 2004, his friend Mr. Sam Speziale, requested assistance from the management of Valero Aruba Refinery to help maintain the monument. The Valero Aruba Refinery graciously sandblasted and painted the anchor and poured a concrete pad around it. On April 17, 2005, the anchor monument was rededicated "To All Seamen" in a formal ceremony in memory of Charles Brouns Jr.

Today, the anchor stands both as memorial to all seaman who have lost their lives at sea, but also as a silent reminder that Seroe Colorado is part of San Nicolas and that San Nicolas is still a vibrant and important part of the island of Aruba.

The best time to visit
When you're planning your visit to the south end of the island, you will want to include in your itinerary the many things to see and do there. The anchor will be just one of these stops, (keep an eye out for our future editions, we publish our recommendations!).

With that being said, I have to say, if you enjoy catching a sunrise, the anchor is one of the best places on the island to catch the sunrise. But in reality, anytime is a good time to visit, depending on your personal schedule.❑

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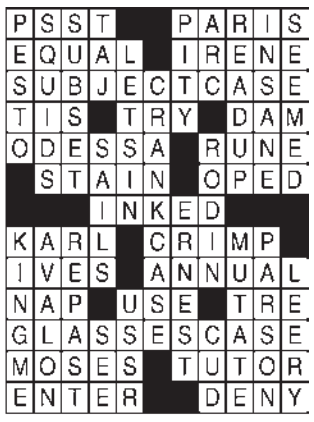
By THOMAS JOSEPH

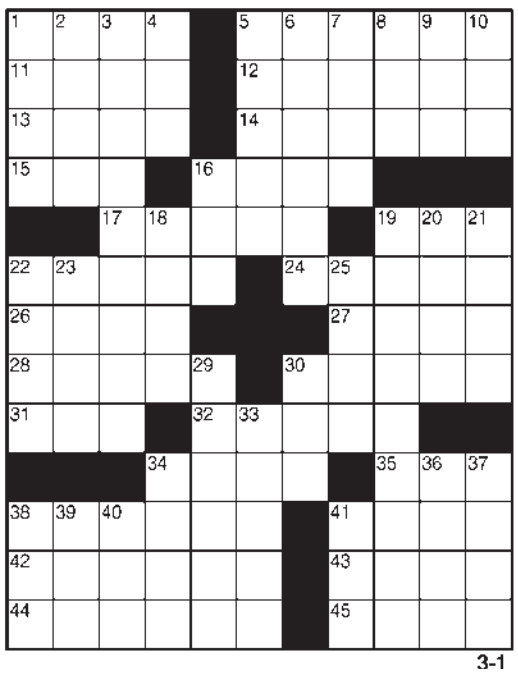


ACROSS

1 Volume
5 Sacred beetle
11 Notorious czar
12 State without proof
13 Uncool fellow
14 Obstructed
15 Pendulum path
16 Blocks up
17 Short poem
19 Kitten cry
22 Do a butler's job
24 Town center
26 Goatee setting
27 Makes mistakes
28 Tirades
30 News summary
31 Chick holder
32 Suppress
34 Obligation
35 Deli meat
38 Financially solvent
41 Washed out
42 South Dakota capital
43 Open space
44 Grade school book
45 Phone message

DOWN

1 Singer Turner
2 Finished
3 Sousa nickname, with "the"
4 Wrap up
5 Man at the wheel
6 Stop talking
7 Some charity
8 "Stand" band
9 Long time
10 Sleep spot
16 Clamor
18 "— No Sunshine"
19 Mad Hatter's friend
20 Poet Pound
21 Hornet's kin
22 Plot unit
23 Uneven hairdo
25 Sediment
29 Town center
30 Bright beam
33 Say
34 Frosh quarters
36 Baseball's Rodriguez
37 Substance
38 Tablet download
39 Fragrant tree
40 Oahu garland
41 Light touch



3-1

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

3-1 CRYPTOQUOTE

V N M S D H F G S H X W P N C J

Q N L 'D S X N P C N T S J E X J X N P

G S H X W J S F P D N Q S J G Q H P.

— O E J N X X E

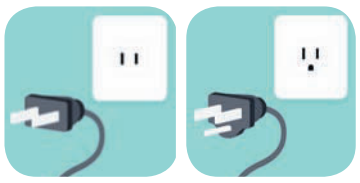
Cryptoquote: DESPITE EVERYTHING, NO ONE CAN DICTATE WHO YOU ARE TO OTHER PEOPLE. — PRINCE

Cruise ship Schedule: Feb. 17 - 24 2026

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
TUE	17	CARNIVAL HORIZON	08.00	22.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	13.30	22.30	C	1
WED	18	SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	C	1
		FREEWINDS	06.00	****	E	1
THU	19	AIDABLU	08.00	18.00	B	1
		MSC DIVINA	08.00	18.00	C	1
FRI	20	NORWEGIAN STAR	11.00	20.00	C	1
SUN	22	ISLAND PRINCESS	08.00	17.00	B	1
		EXPLORA I	08.00	18.00	C	1
MON	23	MARELLA DISCOVERY 2	08.00	20.00	C	1
		FREEWINDS - Dept.	****	22.30	E	-
TUE	24	OCEANIA INSIGNIA	08.00	17.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	13.30	22.30	C	1
		OASIS OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	I	1

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basicbut important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.



Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.

Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku

8		6		5	3	1		
3	2						6	
								9
			1	3	6			
						3	1	
6			9					5
			3		9		5	4
4		5				7		
	8				1			

Difficulty: ★★★ 2/19

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Answer to previous puzzle

7	9	4	1	2	6	3	8	5
6	3	5	4	8	7	2	9	1
1	8	2	9	5	3	7	6	4
9	1	8	2	7	5	4	3	6
5	4	6	8	3	9	1	7	2
2	7	3	6	4	1	8	5	9
8	5	1	3	6	2	9	4	7
4	6	9	7	1	8	5	2	3
3	2	7	5	9	4	6	1	8

Difficulty: ★★★ 2/18

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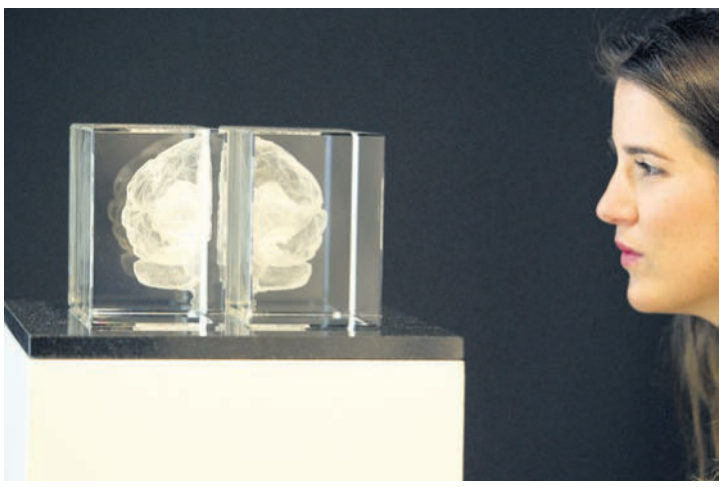


A woman looks at a work by artist, Katharine Dawson, called "The Soul" which is a a laser-etched 3D representaion of her own brain inside a glass block at a preview of a new exhbition "Brains" at the Wellcome Collection in London on March 27, 2012.

Laser-etched glass can store data for millennia, Microsoft says

Paris, France

Thousands of years from now, what will remain of our digital era?

The ever-growing vastness of human knowledge is no longer stored in libraries, but on hard drives that struggle to last decades, let alone millennia.

However, information written into glass by lasers could allow data to be preserved for more than 10,000 years, Microsoft announced in a study on Wednesday.

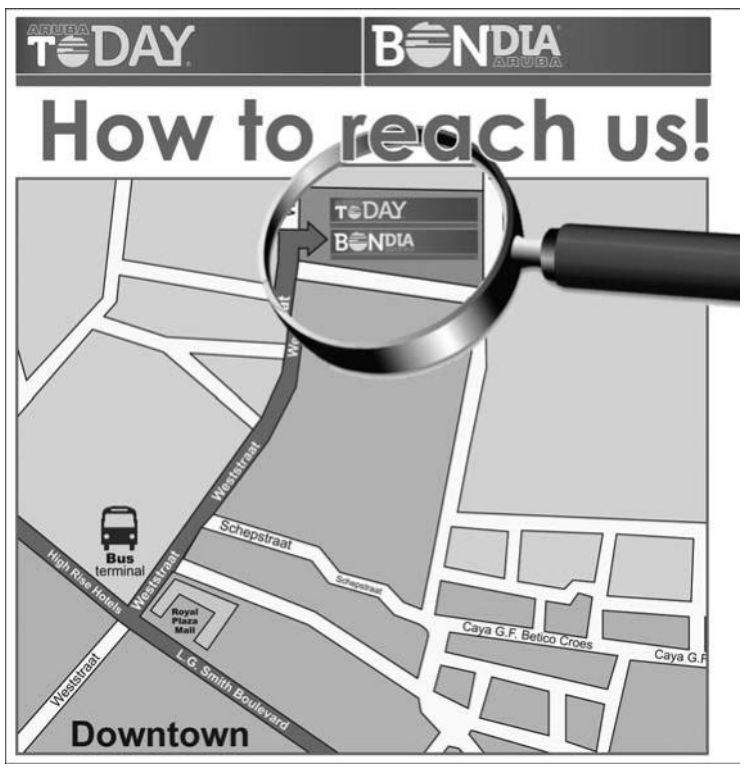
Since 2019, Microsoft's Silica project has been trying to encode data on glass plates, in a throwback to the early days of photography, when negatives were also stored on glass.

The system uses silica glass, a common material that is resistant to changes in temperature, moisture and electromagnetic interference.

These are all problems for energy-hungry data centres, which use fast-degrading hard drives and magnetic tapes that require backing up every few years.

In the journal Nature, Microsoft's research arm said Silica was the first glass storage technology that had been demonstrated to be reliable for writing, reading and decoding data.

However, experts not involved in the project warned that this new tech still faces numerous challenges.❑



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All-in on AI: what TikTok creator ByteDance did next

Beijing, China

After soaring to global attention with its hugely popular TikTok app, Chinese tech giant ByteDance is now positioning itself as a major player in the fast-evolving AI arena.

While the Beijing-based company has been embroiled in a range of legal and privacy rows linked to the social media app for years, its team has been busy branching out developing new cutting-edge products.

Among them is China's most popular artificial intelligence chatbot, Doubao, which has built up more than 100 million daily users since its inception in 2023.

That makes it one of the world's largest processors of AI queries, alongside OpenAI and Google.

Meanwhile, the cinematic clips created by its latest video generator, Seedance 2.0, have further raised the company's international profile.

This photograph taken in Toulouse on February 18, 2026, shows a smartphone screen displaying the logo of Seedance 2.0, an image-to-video and text-to-video AI model developed by Niobotics ByteDance.

But like TikTok, ByteDance's AI services could face trouble in overseas markets owing to issues from data privacy to fierce competition in the sector.

Since OpenAI's ChatGPT revealed the powers of AI on its 2022 debut, ByteDance has believed the technology "would become an even more important application than web search", CEO Liang Rubo said last month.

"ByteDance's shift reflects a deliberate evolution from social media toward an AI native model," Charlie Dai, vice-president and principal analyst at Forrester, told AFP.

Regulatory and political pressure on ByteDance's enormously popular video-sharing app TikTok has fuelled the pivot, he said.

This month, the European Commission said TikTok's "addictive features" breached online content rules, and told it to change its design or face a fine amounting to up to six percent of ByteDance's annual global revenue.

'Evolving circumstances'

The United States had threatened TikTok with a total ban over concerns the platform could be used to harvest Americans' data or spread propaganda.

After lengthy top-level talks over a TikTok divestiture deal, a majority-American-owned joint venture was established in January to operate the app's US business, with ByteDance retaining a stake of less than 20 percent.

Rocky Lee, who uses TikTok and other sites to sell Chinese digital gadgets and pet products to buyers overseas, was relieved by the US deal.

"I can now tell other traders that 'you can go ahead and don't have to worry about it anymore'," Lee, who runs a chat group for cross-border sellers, told AFP.

Lee uses Doubao and other AI tools for various tasks including product selection, market research and sales script-writing.

"We used to have more than a dozen people in our team. Now I reckon maybe four to five people are sufficient," the veteran seller from Xi'an said.

ByteDance was US chip titan Nvidia's largest Chinese client in 2024, and it plans to spend billions of dollars on purchasing AI microchips and building AI infrastructure in 2026.

Though less prominent internationally than domestic competitors such as DeepSeek and Qwen, Doubao models process more than 50 trillion tokens, or units of text, daily.

Google said in October that it handles more than 1.3 quadrillion tokens monthly, which is roughly 43 trillion daily.❑

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Pope spreads digital word to tackle AI-generated fakes

Vatican City, Holy See Pope Leo XIV has urged Catholic organisations to include a direct feed of official Vatican news on their websites as the Holy See battles a flood of AI-generated content.

Vatican News, the Holy See's official news outlet, reported Wednesday that the pontiff had written to bishops inviting them to use the feed on parish, diocese and Catholic association websites.

Pope Leo XIV leads a mass on Ash Wednesday at the Basilica of Saint Sabina, on February 18, 2026.

By embedding a widget, the websites will be able to carry a constantly updating feed of authorised videos of the US pope, as well as speeches, announcements, texts and stories from official Vatican outlets in 40 different languages.

In his letter, the pope told bishops it was a "tool of evangelisation" and "a way for your parishes and communities to constantly obtain information from the primary source".

An AFP investigation after Leo's May 2025 election as head of the Catholic Church identified dozens of YouTube and TikTok pages that were churning out AI-generated videos and recordings attributed to the pope.

On TikTok, one Spanish-language video received 9.6 million views while claiming to show Leo preaching about the value of adoring women. Another, which carried an AI label but still fooled viewers, was watched some 32.9 million times.

Andrea Tornielli, editorial director of the Vatican's Dicastery for Communication, said the new initiative "can serve to combat the phenomenon of fake news by allowing immediate access to the original source of news and texts".❑

Woods return timeline uncertain, but won't rule out Masters

Los Angeles, United States
Tiger Woods says he has no timetable for a return to golf, but the 15-time major champion hasn't ruled out the 2026 Masters even as he ponders the over-50s Champions Tour.
Woods, who turned 50 on December 30, underwent disc replacement surgery in October, the latest in a series of operations and injuries that have kept him sidelined since the 2024 British Open.
"It's just one of those things where it's each and every day, I keep trying, I keep progressing," Woods said Tuesday at The Riviera Country Club, where he hosts this week's PGA Tour Genesis Invitational.
"I keep working on it, trying to get stronger, trying to get more endurance in this body and trying to get it at a level at which I can play at the highest level again," Woods said, adding that he has progressed from chipping and putting practice to hitting full shots.
"I'm able to," he said. "Not well every day, but I can hit them."
Despite the uncertainty, Woods said when asked that the Masters, April 9-12 at Augusta National, was not "off the table."

Woods has won five Masters titles, the most recent an epic 2019 victory that ended his 11-year major championship drought.
He suffered severe leg injuries in a 2021 car crash but returned at the 2022 Masters and finished 47th.
The veteran superstar had a back operation in September 2024 and was rehabilitating from that setback when he announced in March of 2025 that he had suffered a ruptured Achilles tendon.
Woods said the Achilles injury was no longer an issue, but the disc replacement on top of multiple back surgeries over the years was proving challenging to come back from.

A new decade
"I've had a fused back and now a disc replacement, so it's challenging," he said.

Tiger Woods of the United States stands with the trophy on the 18th green during the final round of the Hero World Challenge 2025 at Albany Golf Course on December 07, 2025 in Nassau, Bahamas.

"And now I entered a new decade, so that number is starting to sink in and has us thinking about the opportunity to be able to play in a cart.

"That's something that, as I said, I won't do out here on this (PGA) tour because I don't believe in it. But on the Champions Tour, that's certainly that opportunity."
Even as he strives to ready himself for a return to competition, Woods said he has been devoting a tremendous amount of time as chair of the PGA Tour's Future Competition Committee created to help shape a new-look tour.

"I thought I spent a lot of hours practicing in my prime," Woods said. ❑

Shiffrin finally strikes Olympic gold, China win first title

Milan, Italy

U.S. ski star Mikaela Shiffrin ended her Olympic medal drought in style with gold in the slalom on Wednesday as snowboarder Su Yiming won China's first title of the Milan-Cortina Games.

Shiffrin is one of skiing's all-time greats but she has had to wait eight years since the 2018 Pyeongchang Games for the third gold of her glittering career.

In the final alpine skiing event in Italy, her emotional victory brought some solace to a US ski team still reeling from Lindsey Vonn's horrific crash in the downhill.

The 30-year-old led after the first run in glorious conditions in Cortina d'Ampezzo and cruised to victory in a combined time of 1min 39.10sec, an impressive 1.5sec ahead of Switzerland's world champion Camille Rast.

(From L) Switzerland's silver medalist Camille Rast, USA's gold medalist Mikaela Shiffrin, and Sweden's bronze medalist Anna Swenn Larsson poses during the podium ceremony of the women's slalom event during the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games at the Tofane Alpine Skiing Centre in Cortina d'Ampezzo on February 18, 2026.

Sweden's Anna Swenn Larsson rounded out the podium to claim the first Olympic medal of her career.

Shiffrin shed a tear after a victory that will help banish the bitter memories of both her last Olympics in Beijing where she failed to pick up a single medal from six races and her disappointing displays in the team combined and giant slalom in northern Italy.

"I wanted to be free, I wanted to unleash," said the American. "It's not easy to do that, but I've been so focused every single day.

"Through a lot of discussions with my psychologist and my mum and my team, everything we said was that, despite pressure or nerves, I want to feel this skiing.

"In the end, today, showing up that was the thing I wanted most. More than the medal. Now, to also get to have a medal is unbelievable."

China's gold at last

Team China amassed nine gold medals on home soil at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, but until Wednesday they were yet to win a single title at the Milan-Cortina Games.

Su changed that, winning the snowboard slopestyle gold after losing his big air crown earlier in these Games -- and for good measure, it came on his 22nd birthday and as China celebrates Lunar New Year.

He scored 82.41 points on his first run of three at a sun-soaked Livigno Snow Park and was never caught, upgrading the silver he won four years ago.

Japan's Taiga Hasegawa took silver and Jake Canter of the USA won bronze.

"There's no better way, you know, this is like the best ever," said Su. "I was actually thinking there's no better gift for myself for my 22nd birthday, so I really appreciate it."

Two hours later, China had another gold as freestyle skier Xu Mengtao won the women's aerials final.

Klaebo in class of own

Norwegian cross-country skier Johannes Klaebo won the 10th Olympic gold medal of his career, extending the all-time record he set earlier in the Games.

The only athlete in Winter or Summer Games history with more Olympic titles is American swimmer Michael Phelps, who won 23 golds.

Klaebo and his Norwegian teammate Einar Hedegart comfortably won the team sprint free event, with Klaebo slowing before the finish line to soak up the applause of the crowd.

It was 29-year-old Klaebo's fifth gold medal of these Games alone, meaning he has won every event he has entered and he has one more to go.

The women's singles figure skating contest is finely poised after Japanese teenager Ami Nakai set the pace in the short programme ahead of her more established compatriot Kaori Sakamoto on Tuesday. Nikai, 17, upstaged Sakamoto at the Milano Ice Skating Arena while Alysa Liu of the USA rounded out a powerful top three ahead of Thursday's free skate.❑